

COURSE DESCRIPTION

In this course, we explore what it means for individuals to be privileged and to lack privilege based on social power, whiteness/ethnicity, masculinity/gender, hetero/sexuality, and social class in the United States. Learning about and simultaneously critiquing the disciplines of sociology, psychology, and economics, we examine both individual and social experience in our modern historical context. We look at how human beings shape social experiences and understanding of race, class, sexuality, and gender, and how race, class, sexuality, and gender shape us in our lives. One of the main goals of this class is to develop students' skills in writing, scholarly reading, and critical thinking. This class challenges students to reflect on their personal experiences, evaluate others' arguments, explain social scientific research, and propose their own questions about and answers to modern human experience.

CONTENT WARNING At times, our class reads, views, and discusses gendered, raced, sexual, and other forms of violence. If you have any questions or concerns about this, please do see me. Each student is allowed two absences with no questions asked and no penalty to use to take care of yourself if you need that.

READINGS

Readings will be drawn primarily from the following required texts, along with various **handouts posted online**.

Ehrenreich, B. (2001). *Nickel and dimed: On (not) getting by in America*. Henry Holt and Company.

Halley, J., & Eshleman, A. (2017). *Seeing straight: An introduction to gender and sexual privilege*. Rowman & Littlefield.

Halley, J., Eshleman, A., & Vijaya, R. M. (2022). *Seeing white: An introduction to white privilege and race* (2nd ed.). Rowman & Littlefield.

Morrison, T. (1970). *The bluest eye*. Penguin Books. (Content warning: This reading depicts violence including that of sexual assault. If you have any questions or concerns, please do see me.)

Readings are an essential part of this course. Readings should be completed by dates indicated in the schedule of classes. Please bring the required text to class each day. To do well in this course, your work must display a clear understanding of assigned readings.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

1. Students should become familiar with the kinds of questions social scientists typically ask about ethnicity, race, sexuality, gender, and class, the kinds of research methods social scientists use to answer those questions, and the kinds of theories they use to interpret their research findings.

2. Students should understand social science perspectives on popular ideas about how group identities serve both to facilitate and to constrain people's actions and interactions.
3. Students should begin to use social science perspectives in examining the role of identity groups in contemporary societies, and in interaction with social institutions such as the mass media, schools, and the government and how those institutions help to reproduce or eliminate social stratification.
4. Students should begin to see their own lives, experiences, social class, gender, sexuality, and ethnic background through a social science lens.
5. Students should improve their skills in writing, critical thinking, oral presentation, and class discussion.

CLASS SESSIONS

Week one.

Reading: Halley et al. (2011), *Seeing white*, Chapters 1 and 2

Discussion: 1. Invisibility of whiteness; and

2. Debates about race

Prepare at least one question about the class or/and the reading.

Week two.

Reading: Halley et al., *Seeing white*, Chapters 3 and 4

VIEW VIDEO: Wise & Jhally (2008), *Tim Wise: White privilege, racism, white denial and the cost of inequality*

Discussion: 1. Social construction of race; and

2. White supremacy in everyday life

Week three.

Reading: (Content warning: Both of these readings depict violence including that of sexual assault. If you have any questions or concerns, please do see me.)

Morrison, *The bluest eye*, pp. 1-37; and Halley et al., *Seeing white*, Chapter 5

VIEW MOVIE: Sirk (1959), *Imitation of life*

Discussion: Race, colorism, and beauty standards

Week four.

Reading: Ehrenreich, *Nickel and dimed*, pp. 1-50; and Halley et al., *Seeing white*, Chapter 6

Discussion: Inequality and surviving in the United States

Week five.

Reading: Ehrenreich, *Nickel and dimed*, pp. 51-101

Discussion: 1. The wage gap and the second shift

2. Feminist movements

Week six.

Reading: Halley and Eshleman, *Seeing straight*, Chapters 1 and 2

VIEW DOCUMENTARY: Symons (2002), *Daddy and Papa*

Discussion: Focusing on gender, sexuality, and privilege

Week seven.

Reading: Halley and Eshleman, *Seeing straight*, Chapters 3 and 4

Discussion: Social power and ideas about what it means to be normal

Week eight.

Reading: Morrison, *The bluest eye*, pp. 37-60; and Halley and Eshleman, *Seeing straight*, Chapters 5 and 6

Discussion: Institutions, power, and privilege

Week nine.

Reading: (Content warning: This reading depicts violence including that of sexual assault. If you have any questions or concerns, please do see the instructor.)

Morrison, *The bluest eye*, pp. 60-163

Discussion: Violence and child sexual abuse

Week ten.

Reading: (Content warning: These readings and the video discuss violence including that of sexual assault. If you have any questions or concerns, please do see the instructor.)

Morrison, *The bluest eye*, pp. 163-216; and Halley and Eshleman, *Seeing straight*, Chapter 7

VIEW DOCUMENTARY: Munich (2012) *Rape myths on trial*

Discussion: Intimate partner violence and sexual assault

Week eleven.

Reading: Ehrenreich, *Nickel and dimed: On (not) getting by in America*, pp. 101-161

Discussion: Social class, work and gender

Week twelve.

Reading: Halley et al., *Seeing white*, Chapters 7 and 8

VIEW DOCUMENTARY: Anderson & Gold (2004), *Every mother's son: Policing and race in America*

Discussion: Race and privilege

Week thirteen.

Reading: Halley et al., *Seeing white*, Chapter 9

Discussion: Poverty, conservatism, and the American family

Week fourteen.

Reading: Halley et al., *Seeing white*, Chapter 10; and Halley & Eshleman, *Seeing straight*, Chapter 8

Discussion: Social movements, social change and hope for a more just world